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SYLHET-TAMABIL HIGHWAY

Expansion work to begin after three years

Land acquisition remains a problem for the Tk 3,583.24cr project

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

The work to expand the Sylhet-Tamabil highway to a four-lane one will finally start around three years after the project was approved, with the goal of improving the country's intercity travel and cross-border connectivity.

A Bangladesh-China joint venture firm has been selected for one of the four packages of the Tk 3,583.24-crore project, the physical or civil work of which is expected to begin in September.

But the delay in land acquisition, like many other projects, may hinder the implementation of the project, which is already running behind schedule, said officials of the Roads and Highways Department (RHD), the implementing agency of the project.

In September 2020, the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Ecne) approved the project for expanding 56.16km of the two-lane Sylhet-Tamabil highway into four lanes with service lanes on both sides.

The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) will provide Tk 2,970.56 crore as a loan, while the government will cover the rest of the cost. The deadline for the project is June 2025.

The Sylhet-Tamabil highway is a part of the Asian Highway-1 which links India's Meghalaya and West Bengal through Tamabil - Sylhet - Kanchipur - Dhaka - Jashore - Benapole.

RHD is implementing another project to expand the Dhaka-Sylhet

The RHD is implementing a separate Tk 7,982-crore project to acquire land and shift utility lines to facilitate the expansion of Dhaka-Sylhet and Sylhet-Tamabil highways.

highway.

The corridor is strategically important for sub-regional connectivity with the seven northeastern states of India, as well as Bhutan, Myanmar, and China, officials said.

FIRST CONTRACT

On June 22, the Cabinet Committee on Government Purchase approved a proposal for hiring a Bangladesh-China joint venture firm for Package-2 of the project.

The companies are Abdul Monem Ltd from Bangladesh and QICH from China. The firm will expand the 21.7km road from Khadim to Bager Bazar area.

The firm will get Tk 891.59 crore and four years to complete the job, meaning the project deadline is likely to be extended by at least two years.

"We expect to sign a contract with the firm this month or early next month so that the work can start in September," Project Director Abu Sayeed Md Nazmul Huda told The Daily Star.

Tender processes for two other packages and for hiring consultants are underway, he said, adding that the consultants are expected to be appointed before the beginning of the civil works.

LAND MAIN OBSTACLE

When asked why the civil works have not started yet, Nazmul said it was because of the delay in land acquisition and the selection of contractors.

He said the tendering process to invite contractors was deferred four times due to Covid-induced lockdowns. Besides, they have not yet been able to acquire any land either.

He went on to say that they have to slow down the tendering process because if they appoint a contractor but fail to provide them with the land on time, they will be liable to pay a penalty.

"The RHD has some land of its own and will begin work on that land immediately, and the remaining land will soon be acquired."

The RHD is implementing a separate Tk 7,982-crore project to acquire land and shift utility lines to facilitate the expansion of both the Dhaka-Sylhet and Sylhet-Tamabil highways.

A car appears to plunge into a water-filled crater on Dhaka-Chattogram highway near the capital's Jatrahari. The road has been posing risks to motorists for months, but the bouts of rain over the last few days have made driving even trickier. The pristine road on the left is the approach road to the tolled Mayor Mohammad Hanif Flyover.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

France riots less intense on 5th night

Fewer arrests made; mayor's home rammed, wife injured

REUTERS, Paris

Rioting across France was less intense overnight, the interior ministry said yesterday, as tens of thousands of police were deployed following the funeral of a teenager of North African descent whose shooting by police has sparked nationwide unrest.

However, rioters ram-raided the home of a Paris suburb mayor, set the car alight, and launched fireworks at his wife and young children.

Vincent Jeanbrun, 39, the centre-right mayor of the southern suburb of L'Hay-les-Roses, was at the town hall when his house was attacked with his wife Melanie and children asleep inside.

The aggressors drove their vehicle at the suburban house but were halted by a low wall ringing the property's outdoor terrace, the local public prosecutor said. They then torched their vehicle.

As Jeanbrun's wife and children, aged 5 and 7, took flight through the back yard, they were targeted with fireworks. Jeanbrun told Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne his wife had had surgery to a broken leg and faced a three-month rehabilitation.

"While attempting to shield them and fleeing the attackers, my wife and one of my

children were hurt," the mayor said.

The local prosecutor told reporters that an investigation into attempted murder had been opened. No suspects have been arrested.

Elsewhere, President Emmanuel Macron postponed a state visit to Germany that was due to begin yesterday to handle the worst crisis for his leadership since the "Yellow Vest" protests paralysed much of France in late 2018.

He was due to meet his ministers last day evening to review the situation, the presidency said, after the prime minister said on Friday the government's "crisis unit" had been activated until further notice.

Nahel's death has fed longstanding complaints of police violence and systemic racism inside law enforcement agencies from rights groups and within the low-income, racially mixed suburbs that ring major cities in France. Authorities deny that.

An officer has acknowledged firing a lethal shot, the prosecutor says, telling investigators he wanted to prevent a police chase, fearing he or another person would be hurt. The officer involved is under investigation for voluntary homicide.

The interior ministry said 719 people were arrested last night, fewer than the 1,311 the previous night and 875 on Thursday night.

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'Ghostly' new portrait of Milky Way revealed

CNN ONLINE

For the first time, astronomers have assembled a glowing portrait of the Milky Way galaxy using cosmic "ghost particles" detected by a telescope embedded in Antarctica's ice.

Over the years, astronomers have showcased stunning images of the Milky Way through

electromagnetic radiation from visible light or radio waves. But this is a new perspective of our galaxy based on particles of matter, rather than energy.

The so-called ghost particles are neutrinos. These tiny, high-energy cosmic particles are often referred to as ghostly because they are extremely vaporous and can pass through any kind of matter without changing.

The research was published Thursday in the journal Science.

"I remember saying, 'At this point in human history, we're the first ones to see our galaxy in anything other than light,'" said study coauthor Naoko Kurahashi Neilson, associate professor of physics at Drexel University, in a statement reflecting on when she and two doctoral students initially saw the image.

Country's first undersea pipeline now in service

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A 110km pipeline to transport crude oil and diesel from a deep-sea mooring, 16km off the Maheshkhali coast, to Eastern Refinery Ltd in Chattogram's Patenga has been commissioned yesterday.

After trial runs, the pipeline was commissioned at 9:00pm, said Md Lokman, Managing Director of Eastern Refinery Limited (ERL).

"We were able to connect the Single Point Mooring (SPM), the floating station of the pipeline, with the MT Horai ship, which has carried 82,000 tons of crude oil from Saudi Arabi, around 4:00pm, Md Lokman said.

With the commissioning of the country's first undersea pipeline, lighter vessels will no longer be required to unload petroleum products from large tankers and carry those to the refinery. This will save time and about Tk 800 crore a year, according to Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation.

Under the Single Point Mooring (SPM) project, two parallel pipelines have been installed -- one for crude oil and the other for diesel.

Md Lokman says the pipeline will cut transportation time by 8 days. It will also not affect unloading oil in bad weather.

According to the BPC, the pipes from the storage facility to the Eastern Refinery are 18 inches in diameter. About 65km of these are under the sea.

BPC, with the funding of the Exim Bank of China, has implemented the project at a cost of Tk 7,124 crore.

French police officers detain a demonstrator in Paris yesterday, five days after a 17-year-old boy was killed by police in Nanterre, a western suburb of Paris. French police arrested 1,311 people across the country during a fourth consecutive night of rioting over the killing of the teenager.

PHOTO: AFP

Govt to maintain austerity to limit expenses

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government is continuing its austerity measures and the embargos on operational and development expenses remain almost the same as before for government, semi-government, and autonomous bodies.

The stance was taken last fiscal year amid strained foreign currency reserves, elevated global and domestic inflation, and continued jitters surrounding the Russia-Ukraine war.

In a circular yesterday, the finance ministry said government organisations can spend up to 75 percent of the allocation for electricity and up to 80 percent for fuel.

No vehicles, planes, helicopters, ships, or boats can be purchased by the government, semi-government, autonomous and statutory bodies, state-owned enterprises, financial institutions or under any development projects.

However, 10-year-old motor vehicles can be replaced under operational budget.

Expenditure for land acquisition under operational budget will remain restricted but, like in the last fiscal, it will be relaxed for development projects, subject to finance division's approval.

The government restricts foreign trips under operational and development allocations. It will, however, not be applicable for studies under government and foreign financing. Training and inspections financed by foreign organisations and contractors will not be restricted.